

Battle of Adwa Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:

How did Ethiopia defeat Italy at the Battle of Adwa?

Materials:

- Documents A-B
- Guiding Questions
- PowerPoint

Plan of Instruction:

- 1) Introduction: Use PowerPoint to introduce inquiry, establish or review necessary background information, and explore a short textbook account of the Battle of Adwa.
 - a. Slides 1 & 2: Introduce lesson
 - i. *This is a painting of the Battle of Adwa, which was painted by an unknown Ethiopian artist. The exact date of the painting is also unknown. The battle was fought between Ethiopia and Italy on March 1, 1896. It lasted one day, and was a decisive victory for Ethiopia.*
 - ii. *The battle was significant because it marked the biggest African victory over a European army in the 19th century. The battle helped keep Ethiopia, or Abyssinia, one of the only parts of Africa to remain independent during the “scramble for Africa” in the second half of the 19th century – a time when European powers established colonies across most of African continent.*
 - b. Slide 3: Inquiry Question
 - i. *Our question today is: How was Ethiopia able to defeat the Italian army at the Battle of Adwa and stay independent?*
 - ii. *To address this question, we are going to look at 3 different textbook accounts, 2 American and 1 Ethiopian.*
 - iii. *One of our primary objectives for the day is to compare and contrast - or corroborate - information across these different textbooks. Part of our job is to identify what these accounts have in common and how they are different.*
- 2) Begin Inquiry with the textbook passage on Slide 4. Introduce modeling of the first textbook account of the battle.
 - a. Model reading textbook to students:
 - i. *Ok, so checking the source information here, I see this excerpt comes from an American, World History Textbook published in 2006. I am assuming it's going to provide a*

pretty simple explanation, or overview of the Battle, given the amount of text here. Wow, it is a really short passage. That seems very typical of many textbook accounts of historical events. It's hard to "cover everything," I guess. So, I am reading this with the purpose of trying to figure out how Ethiopia defeated Italy at the Battle of Adwa. "Only the African nation of Ethiopia was able to retain its independence by matching European firepower." Well there you go. It sounds like the Ethiopians in this case had a strong military. Let's see what else it says. "In 1889 the emperor of Ethiopia, Menelik II, undertook a program of modernization that included a modern Army." Ok. A modern army, and perhaps a strong leader too – this person Menelik II the emperor. "In 1895, Italian forces invaded Ethiopia over a treaty dispute. Within a year, however, Menelik's forces – more numerous and better armed than the Italians – defeated the Italians at the Battle of Adwa." Well that does not tell me much. I guess that is to be expected in such a short excerpt. According to the textbook Ethiopia won this battle because it had a bigger and better armed army.

- 3) Hand out documents A and B with guiding questions. In pairs, students read textbook excerpt A and answer the questions.

- a. Share out responses to guiding questions.

Important to note:

- *The central importance of Menelik in this textbook.*
- *The effect of differing versions of the treaty, which is not mentioned in the first textbook account.*
- *The importance attributed to modern weapons, a reason shared with the first textbook.*

- 4) In pairs, students read textbook excerpt B and answer guiding questions.

- a. Share out responses to guiding questions.

Important to Note:

- *This account is the most substantial of the 3.*
- *Menelik's friendly relations with Italy is not mentioned in the American textbooks.*
- *The different version of how the conflict between Italy and Ethiopia began. This account positions Italy as the aggressor, both in the lead up to battle and as the instigator of the battle.*
- *The description of the Ethiopian army as "ill-trained" and not "well armed"- the direct opposite of the other textbooks*

- *The other factors mentioned to explain Ethiopia's victory – namely, the courage and support of the people and the participation of women.*

5) Making a Claim

- a. Students write a paragraph addressing the central historical question.

6) Discussion

- *How are the narratives that appear in the two textbooks similar?*
- *How are the two versions different?*
- *Why do you think they are so different. Which, if either, do you find more trustworthy?*
- *Why was Ethiopia able to defeat the Italian army at the Battle of Adwa?*
- *What other sources might you look at either to corroborate these textbook accounts, or to find out more information about the battle?*

Citations:

Mehari, Getachew, Mamo, A., Alemu, T., T'Giorgis, S., & Dissassa, M. (2006). *Social studies student textbook: Grade 8*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Educational Materials Production and Distribution Enterprise. p. 86-88.

Beck, R. B., Black, L., Krieger, L.S., Naylor, P.C., Shabaka, D.I. (2006) *Modern world history: Patterns of interaction*. McDougal Littell. p. 349.

Ramirez, S., Stearns, P., & Wineburg, S. (2008). *World history: Human legacy*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. p. 760.

Document A: American Textbook

Ethiopia: A Successful Resistance

Ethiopia was the only African nation that successfully resisted the Europeans. Its victory was due to one man – Menelik II. He became emperor of Ethiopia in 1889. He successfully played Italians, French, and British against each other, all of whom were striving to bring Ethiopia into their spheres of influence. In the meantime, he built up a large arsenal of modern weapons purchased from France and Russia. In 1889, shortly after Menelik had signed a treaty with Italy, he discovered differences between the wording of the treaty in the Ethiopian language and in Italian. Menelik believed he was giving up only a tiny portion of Ethiopia. However, the Italians claimed all of Ethiopia as a protectorate. Meanwhile, the Italian forces were advancing into northern Ethiopia. Menelik declared war. In 1896, in one of the greatest battles in the history of Africa – the Battle of Adowa – Ethiopian forces successfully defeated the Italians and kept their nation independent. After the battle, Menelik continued to stockpile rifles and other modern weapons in case another foreign power challenged Ethiopia's liberty.

Source: Beck, R. B., Black, L., Krieger, L.S., Naylor, P.C., Shabaka, D.I. (2006) *Modern world history: Patterns of interaction*. McDougal Littell. p. 349.

Document B: Ethiopian Textbook

Foreign Relations with Italy

Menelik had very close relations with foreign nations, especially with Italy. The relationship between Italy and Ethiopia began as a friendly one, but it deteriorated after the Treaty of Wuchale was signed between them in 1889. The cause of the conflict was Article XVII of the Wuchale Treaty, which was written differently in Amharic and Italian. The Amharic version says that Ethiopia could use the services of Italy in her foreign relations with Europe. The Italian version bound Menelik to make all his foreign decisions through Italy. Menelik asked Italy to change the Italian version of Article XVII. Italy refused. As a result, Menelik rejected the entire treaty. Thus, when peaceful methods of trying to occupy Ethiopia failed, the Italian government began preparation to occupy Ethiopia by force. In 1895, the Italians invaded Ethiopia in the north. In the same year, 1895, Menelik declared war on Italy and marched northwards to fight the Italians.

The Battle of Adwa (1896)

The Battle of Adwa was fought in March 1896 between the Ethiopian army commanded by Menelik and the Italian army commanded by General Baratieri. The battle was started by the Italian commander Baratieri because he was given orders by the Italian prime Minister Crispi to start the war quickly.

The battle began at dawn on March 1, 1896. The battle lasted for one full day. The result of the battle was unexpected and surprising to the world. The well-trained and well-armed Italian force was defeated by the ill-trained and not well-armed Ethiopian force. Ethiopia was victorious because of her people's high degree of courage and the full support of the people. Moreover, Ethiopian women supplied water and arms to the fighters. They carried the wounded to camps and encouraged the fighters to fight with great courage.

Source: Mehari, Getachew, Mamo, A., Alemu, T., T'Giorgis, S., & Dissassa, M. (2006). *Social studies student textbook: Grade 8*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Educational Materials Production and Distribution Enterprise. p. 86-88.

Guiding Questions

American Textbook
1. Who, according to this textbook, was most responsible for the Ethiopian victory?
2. What event led to the battle?
3. Who, according to this account, started the war?
4. Why, according to this account, did Ethiopia win the battle?
5. How is this account similar to and different from the first textbook account?

Guiding Questions

Ethiopian Textbook

1. According to this account, what events led to war between Ethiopia and Italy? How is this version similar to and different from textbook A?

2. Who, according to this account, started the battle? Why did they start the battle?

3. Why, according to this account, did Ethiopia win the battle? How does this compare to the other accounts?

Making a Claim:

How did Ethiopia defeat Italy at the Battle of Adwa?

Write a paragraph in the space below, using evidence from the documents to support your claim.